(4) Holding of unit ammunition in depots to be avoided.

(5) Storage and handling of ammunition to be as per regulations.

(6) Ammunition Regulations need updating.

(7) Gazette notification under Indian Works of Defence Act 1903, to be issued.

The Court of Inquiry has held three Officers, one JCO and three ORs responsible. The Court of Inquiry has been finalized only recently. However, departmental directions on security, fire fighting and management of ammunition have been reiterated.

(d) **2 Ammunition Sub Depot (24 FAD), Birdhwal (Ganganagar), 24.5.2001:** The cause of fire will only be ascertained after completion of the Court of Inquiry, which is under progress.

Reasons of Fire: From the reports of the various Courts of Inquiry it can be said that there was no conspiracy, nor was there any evidence that these fires were set off to cover pilferage.

The following steps have been taken to prevent such incidents in the Defence installations:—

(i) All depots have been directed to update safety and security instructions.

(ii) All depots have been inspected by a Board of Officers to check adequacy of safety and security arrangements.

(iii) Shortages in fire fighting equipment are being made up and defective equipment repaired.

(iv) Unserviceable ammunition is being disposed off on priority.

(v) Allotment of additional funds for creation of more storage accommodation, for shifting ammunition presently stored on open plinths under canvas to Explosive Stores Houses.

Wage ceiling

*73. SHRI GAYA SINGH:
SHRI J. CHITHARANJAN:

Will the Minister of LABOUR be pleased to refer to the answer to unstarred Question 454 given in the Rajya Sabha on the 23rd November, 2000, and state:

(a) whether Government have taken a final decision on the proposal to enhance the wage ceiling for coverage under the EPF and MP Act; and

(b) if so, what are the details thereof?

THE MINISTER OF LABOUR (DR. SATYANARAYAN JATIYA): (a)Yes, Sir.

(b) The wage ceiling for coverage has been raised from Rs. 5000/- to Rs. 6500/- per month under the Employees Provident Funds & Miscellaneous Provisions Act, 1952 *with effect from* 1.6.2001.

MoU with Myanmar to maintain Tamu-Kalewa Road

*74. PROF. (SHRIMATI) BHARATI RAY: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether India has signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with Myanmar for maintenance of 160 km long Tamu-Kalemyo-Kalewa Road;

(b) if so, the details thereof; and

(c) by when MoU would be operative for the benefit of people of both the countries?

THE MINISTER OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI JASWANT SINGH): (a) to (c) A Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between the Government of the Union of Myanmar and the Government of the Republic of India on cooperation in the maintenance of the Tamu-Kalemyo road was signed on 25th May, 2001 in Yangon. Under this MoU the Government of India has the responsibility for the maintenance of the road for the first six years by providing the services of an Indian Road Maintenance Force along with necessary materials, equipment and manpower.

The MoU entered into force from the date of its signing *i.e.* from 25th May, 2001.

Computerisation of Passport Offices

*75. SHRI K. C. KONDAIAH: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) the number of Passport Offices functioning in the country;